

Sermon: Blessed Are We

Year A, All Saints

[Revelation 7:9-17; Psalm 34:1-10; 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12](#)

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Back in my corporate days, I was on a business trip to Chicago, out at a fancy restaurant on my expense account. The waiter was clearly new and, honestly, he was doing a pretty terrible job. I looked over at my colleague and said, “Well, we all had times when we were new at our job.” He smiled at me. “Oh, I don’t mind the training wheels. I just wish they didn’t squeak so loud.”

In the Protestant tradition, we believe that when we die, we join the communion of Saints. That’s why we celebrated communion after we had named our saints, so that when we came to the Lord’s table today, we had an explicit reminder of who is there with us. When we close today’s worship service, we will have our circle surround the candles, reminding us of the Saints who are with us always.

There are times when I look around at the Saints-in-Training which surround me, here and in the rest of my life and wish the training wheels didn’t squeak so loud. From everything we know of the disciples who followed Jesus, they appeared to have felt the same way at times. They might not have been perfect disciples, but those other jamokes, when were they ever going to get it together?

Today’s reading from Matthew, part of the Sermon on the Mount, is from the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, when everyone was new at their job of sharing the preaching and teaching of Jesus. All he had was rookies. And he was asking them to go so far beyond everything that they knew how to do. So he begins his teaching with the Beatitudes. He begins teaching them how to be disciples by building on what they know, who they already are. They are poor in spirit, meek, hungry and thirsty. They are all those things which are not considered to be on the pathway to happiness, to blessing. Before he sends them out to make disciples of all the nations (Matthew 28:19), he makes it plain that who they already are is enough, is more than enough, to serve God fully,¹ they are already on the path to blessing.

Because when they bring those gaps in their lives to Jesus, that poverty, that hunger and thirst, all those things that are missing, when they bring that emptiness to Christ, they will be filled with his righteousness.² That righteousness, that right relationship with God, must be a gift before it becomes a practice.³ And the only way to receive that gift is to acknowledge and accept those gaps.

In part, I think that’s why we all love the Beatitudes. We all recognize ourselves in one or two or all of them. The world says that all those gaps need to be filled, with money, and power, and dominance and ego and violence and possessions and control. The world says that all those gaps need to be hidden, that we need to pretend that we are not what we know ourselves to be.

¹ Karoline M. Lewis, “Fourth Sunday after Epiphany” in *Preaching Year A with Anna Carter Florence: Reflections on the Gospel Readings (2016-2017) Revised Common Lectionary*. (St. Paul, MN: Luther Seminary, 2016), 31.

² John Koessler, “Eat, Drink and Be Hungry: It’s Emptiness, not Fullness, that Jesus Blesses.” *Christianity Today* 51, no. 8, (2007), 36.

³ Koessler, 36.

Jesus says, “No.” Jesus says, “It is because of all those gaps, all that emptiness that you are ready to make disciples of all the world.” Jesus begins his teaching by pointing out what New Beginnings sings, “No matter the bumps, no matter the bruises, no matter the scars, still the truth is, the cross has made, the cross has made you flawless.”⁴ Blessed are all those gaps and hungers, all those bumps and bruises, all those missing parts that the rest of the world scorns us for not having.

So when the training wheels on your Sainthood is squealing, when you are mourning for someone you loved who was always much closer to Sainthood than you will ever be, when the gaps threaten to join together and swallow you whole and lead you to disappear from the face of the earth, remember when Jesus started with his followers. Blessed are those who acknowledge their emptiness, for it will be filled with righteousness. Blessed are we who have to admit how very empty we are, how scarred and bruised we are. Because who we are is enough to make disciples of all the world. Blessed are we.

⁴ *Flawless* by MercyMe